DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 136 139 CG 011 177

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TITLE The Industry That Can.
PUB DATE 9 Nov 76
NOTE 11p.; Speech presented at the National Education Association-Industry Meeting (Houston, Texas, November 9, 1976)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Agencies; *Career Education; *Educational Finance; Federal Government; *Federal Programs; Federal State Relationship; *Government Role; Public Relations; Speeches; State of the Art Reviews; *Trade and Industrial Education; *Vocational Education

ABSTRACT

This speech by the U.S. Commissioner of Education reviews the education industry and education-industry relations. Examples illustrate the effective partnership that can be created to fashion and achieve successful vocational and career education programs. (MML)

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THE INDUSTRY THAT CAN *

Edward Aguirre

U.S. Commissioner of Education

I understand that most of the corporations represented here this noon are among Fortune magazine's "Top 500 Industrials" and that together your companies account for about half of the Nation's gross national product.

Certainly, the industries you represent -- chemicals, pharmaceuticals, communications, electricity, paper, automobiles, insurance, and many more -- are the lifeline of America's economic strength, a major source of our high standard of living, and the resource that undergirds our position of leadership in the world.

You are a high-powered group indeed, and I would find you a bit overwhelming were it not for one thing. With the possible exception of health services, I represent the largest American industry of all -- education.

Education is now a $130-billion-dollar-a-year enterprise in the United States. It involves three in every 10 Americans as students or faculty and staff members -- some 63 million people.

Education is far and away our most decentralized industry. Elementary and secondary education has 16,000 boards of directors -- the local school boards that make most of the decisions about what is taught and how to pay for it. There are an equal number of chief executive officers -- the school superintendents who carry out board decisions.

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* Prepared for the National Education Association-Industry Meeting; Houston, Texas, November 9, 1976, 12:30 p.m. CST (1:30 p.m. EST).

Fifty-six State and outlying area departments of education have oversight responsibility for some standardization in local education programs within their jurisdiction. Postsecondary education -- our colleges, universities, and technical schools -- add another 2,300 management operations to the nationwide list.

All these management systems must do their best to comply with congressional mandates to provide fair and equal access to education for minorities, women, the handicapped, the non-English-speaking, and everyone else.

Education may or may not be the largest American industry, but it certainly is the Nation's most important. The quality of the products being offered our young people today by this giant enterprise is going to determine the quality of our corporate, political, and social leadership a generation from now.

Education's product line is enough to drive the best industrial design and management team up the wall. Schools and colleges are expected to offer just about every kind of training and experience that young people will need to make their way in a society that offers 23,000 occupational choices and -- so it seems at least -- about as many lifestyles and points of view.

Education has long been charged with teaching students the fundamental tools of learning -- the three Rs -- and the fundamental knowledge and problem solving skills that will broaden their intellectual horizon and equip them to take a responsible and rewarding place in society. Increasingly

in recent years, however, schools have been required by our changing way of life and the industrialization of the economy to take on components of the student's total development that were the task of parents, community, and workplace when we were a rural, cottage-industry country. Today schools find themselves teaching everything from citizenship and ethical behavior to the dangers of drugs and alcohol, and from how to fill out a job application to how to drive a car.

On top of all this is the quality control factor. We are all -- and I know this includes your personnel recruiters -- concerned about the decline in student achievement scores. More young people are entering the labor market without the skills they need to perform effectively. How did this happen? What can we do about it? As U.S. Commissioner of Education, I certainly intend to do all I can to help the education community reverse this disheartening trend.

On balance, however, I think we need to remember that American education has a remarkable track record. Historically, it has performed seemingly impossible tasks and maybe even a miracle or two. In the 19th century we said that every child in this sparsely settled democracy should have access to free public schooling. We provided it. At the close of the century we asked the schools to teach English, citizenship, and job skills to some 20 million immigrants from many different nations and cultures. Our schools did it. After World War II we asked our colleges, universities, and technical schools to expand their facilities and course offerings to meet the needs of a new generation of veterans. They did it, and ultimately some 15 million men and women benefitted.

Educators have a tough, demanding job. I know this first hand because I have spent my professional life in education and manpower training. I know educators need and welcome all the help they can get.

I am delighted that such industries as yours are interested in getting involved in education in positive and creative ways. That interest is evident in your presence here to consider a joint NEA-industry plan. It is evident as well in the many school-industry efforts already in place around the country.

I consider it a special privilege to represent education in this forum. Perhaps I can be most helpful in the next few minutes by talking about some of the things the U.S. Office of Education is doing to encourage and support innovation in our schools in cooperation with States, local school systems, colleges and universities, industry, and labor organizations. They are things you may want to tie in with, or at least be aware of, if you decide to develop model school programs, establish an economics education clearinghouse, and hold community meetings with teachers, school administrators, and others, as has been proposed.

By way of setting the stage for what I want to say about the Federal role in innovation and reform, I should point out that the Office of Education is the major conduit for programs and funds appropriated by Congress to aid our schools and colleges. Obviously, Federal aid to schools and colleges really means aid to improve education for our young people.

Of course, education is constitutionally a State and local responsibility. Federal funds provide "extras" beyond basic school and college

staffing, operation, and maintenance that will improve the quality and equal availability of education for all students.

The Office of Education budget runs around $7-8 billion a year, but this is only about 7 percent of the total $130-billion outlay for education. More than $1 billion goes for special remedial programs to help disadvantaged youngsters.

About 90 percent of the Office of Education's money flows directly to State and local education agencies to help them finance their own initiatives, with few strings attached. The remaining 10 percent is discretionary money. With much of this money we fund demonstration projects or model programs, based on competitive proposals submitted by schools and other learning centers, in such areas as bilingual, Indian, adult, environmental, and consumer education, and education for the handicapped.

Our discretionary projects involve new approaches to teaching and motivating students. They look good on paper. The question is, Will they work? We consider them worth testing in real school situations, usually with more than one group of students and for more than one year. Some fail, but a surprising number succeed -- and we have the statistics to prove it.

The Office of Education and the National Institute of Education, our counterpart agency for research, have set up a panel of experts that rigorously evaluates the projects submitted for validation. Some 200 projects -- many of them exploring new ways to teach children to read -- have passed this test with flying colors.

After validation, the next step is to help school districts learn about, select, and install any new approaches that seem to meet the learning needs of their student body. For this we have set up the National Diffusion Network. The Nation's 16,000 school districts now have full

access to the staff training workshops and teaching materials needed to install th

School systems are using the Network. For example, a course for high school students showing the influence of TV and other mass media on public opinion was developed in the little town of Red Oak, Iowa; it has been picked up by 100 schools in 19 States. Another new approach, this one to help teenagers gain confidence in their learning ability, was developed in Lakewood, Ohio, and is being used in 125 school districts.

Besides the Diffusion Network, we support a number of national clearinghouses to help narrow the gap between new and traditional teaching methods. Some clearinghouses are devoted to a single aspect of education. There is a national clearinghouse for bilingual education, for example, one for career education, another for community education, and still another for education of the handicapped. On the drawing board is a clearinghouse for adult education and lifelong learning. There are 16 clearinghouses for higher education.

These resource centers have most of the research and demonstration materials developed over the years in their particular subject, and these materials are available to educators for the asking.

So we have two nationwide systems -- the National Diffusion Network and the clearinghouses -- to facilitate the exchange of innovative ideas and programs that we know are working. I'm sure that the people running both systems would be happy to share their experience and expertise -- and, I suspect, a few problems -- with those of you exploring the model program and clearinghouse concepts as part of the proposed NEA-Industry Project.

Let me turn now to some examples at the local level of education-industry-labor cooperation that are really making a difference in the lives of students.

In Akron, Ohio, area high school students, teachers, and guidance counselors are getting first-hand exposure to career opportunities thanks to an industry-labor consortium working through the Akron Regional Development Board. The Board arranges for classroom speakers from many professions and trades to tell students about their jobs. Students later have the opportunity to explore these various careers through visits and work experience in factories and offices. There is a job-placement service for graduates. Also offered is in-service training for teachers in economics education. Participating in this program, among others, are Goodyear, Ohio Edison, and Goodrich, the Kiwanis and Rotary Clubs, and the United Rubber, Cork, Linoleum, and Plastic Workers of America. I'm pleased to say the Office of Education is a participant in this industry-labor initiative.

The Industry-Education Council of California has been running a similar program in San Francisco and neighboring school districts for the past two years. The Council includes the Bank of America, Pacific

Telephone, Atlantic Richfield, Transamerica, Rockwell International, and other corporations. Again, the Office of Education is participating.

In still another instance -- More than 100 firms and unions are cooperating with the Portland, Oregon, schools, including General Telephone, First National Bank of Oregon, and the Oregon AFL-CIO.

Yet another -- Working through the Central Jersey Industry-Education Council, to make career preparation more meaningful to students in the Woodbridge Township Public Schools, are Reynolds Metals, Eastern Airlines, Prudential Insurance, Chevron Oil, and Bell Telephone.

These kinds of partnership are springing up all over the country, and they are among the most productive partnerships I've seen in education in many years.

The Office of Education a few years ago suggested to the States and outlying areas -- successfully I'm pleased to say -- that they name an industry-education-labor coordinator to encourage more of these partnerships. The Office followed its own advice by appointing a coordinator in each of its 10 Regional Offices with an overall coordinator in Washington.

The idea was endorsed by education's top management organizations, including the Council of Chief State School Officers and the American Association of School Administrators, and by the National Association of Manufacturers, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and the major labor organizations.

As a result, some 65 people in State and Federal governments stand ready and willing to assist industry, business, and labor in setting up cooperative programs with schools.

In view of these many initiatives, I think we've made a good start. I'm convinced we're on the right track. If there is a problem -- and I believe there is -- it's that school people and industry people in many communities still haven't had the time, incentive, or opportunity to sit down together and find ways to pool their resources in the interest of better career education and other learning programs for students. That's why the thousand or so local community meetings that have been proposed for American Education Week next year could have a real impact.

I hope that parents and other public spokesmen as well as school and industry people will participate in those town meetings.

The single most critical issue that schools face today is eroding public confidence. There may or may not be a real decline in the quality of education. Part of my mission as Commissioner of Education is to engage in an energetic campaign to restore public confidence in education. Your town meetings could give NEA and industry a wonderful opportunity to listen to public concerns about education and what should be done about them.

I sincerely hope too that students will be included in these meetings. Looking back on his career, Will Rogers once said. "The one thing I'm sorriest about is that I didn't stick around to take on the fifth grade." These days we require youngsters to stick around somewhat longer than that. But too many of them opt out of the system as soon as we let them. We know only too well the correlation between unemployed out-of-school youth and the increase in vandalism, violence, drug use, and alcoholism, not to mention the loss to the economy.

If we can make education more realistic, more compatible with the adult world we catapult young people into, maybe they will stick around long enough to let schooling do its job. The important thing is to listen to students now, while they are young, idealistic, searching, testing -- and often mystified by the way adults tend to think, act, and line up their priorities.

Education is big. It's costly. It's labor intensive. It has problems, some of its own making, some generated by society.

Still, education in America is a marvelous machine. It is run by highly trained and motivated professionals. Fine-tuned to the national will, it can give us just about anything we ask. History has repeatedly shown us this, most recently perhaps in the complete overhaul of science and foreign language programs after Sputnik.

What education most needs is a new statement of the national will -- a clear sense of public priorities about what schools should and should not be doing. Education will respond.

The persistent locomotive in the children's story made it to the top of the mountain puffing "I know I can." Education is like that. It is an industry that, with your help, can.

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